

Written Testimony Submitted to the Connecticut General Assembly Joint Committee on Judiciary **in support of Raised Senate Bill No. 1019: An Act Concerning The Board Of Pardons And Paroles, Erasure Of Criminal Records For Certain Misdemeanor And Felony Offenses, Prohibiting Discrimination Based On Erased Criminal History Record Information And Concerning the Recommendations of the Connecticut Sentencing Commission with Respect to Misdemeanor Sentences**

To the Honorable Senator Winfield, the Honorable Representative Stafstrom, and distinguished members of the Joint Committee on Judiciary:

My name is Reverend Elizabeth Butler Arulampalam. I am the Co-lead Pastor of Riverfront Family Church in Hartford, an American Baptist church and Associate Pastor of Church of Christ Congregational Church in Newington. I am writing to support Senate Bill 1019.

As a Baptist and United Church of Christ minister, I lead my congregation to offer forgiveness, second chances and grace to one another. I believe each of us are created in the image of a God who allows people the opportunity to repent, to turn around. Peter asked Jesus how many times should he forgive another person. Jesus answered 70 times 7. As a person of faith, I also believe that God offers marginalized people healing and a fresh start.

This fresh start is especially needed for those living in poverty and those who have been marginalized by society. [Nearly half](#) the people in Connecticut's shelters have been incarcerated. [A criminal record](#) reduces a job seeker's chance of getting a callback or job offer by nearly 50 percent. Mercy and care for the poor are bedrocks of the Christian faith as well as many of the other world religions. This proposed bill will help to address systemic poverty and help us move towards greater racial equity and justice in the criminal justice system.

This issue also disproportionately targets communities of color. A Nationally, [one in three Black men](#) have a felony conviction, compared to just 8% of the total population. Here in Connecticut, 25% - 31% of Black men have a felony conviction. This is driven, in part, by the fact that Black and Latinx people continue to receive harsher and longer sentences for the same crimes as white people. As a white person who grew up in Glastonbury and who now lives in Hartford, I have seen both sides of this inequity. The people in the community I grew up with were not held to the same standards as my neighbors in Hartford. Growing up in suburbia, I rarely saw a police officer in my neighborhood. My children see the police literally every day on the streets they play on. Our community is over policed and as a result, my Black and Brown neighbors suffer.

I support the clean slate bill raised in the Judiciary Committee (**S.B. 1019**). Passing a real, robust, inclusive clean slate bill would allow people who have already been punished to support themselves, provide for their families, and contribute to their communities. Clean slate would automatically expunge the criminal records of people who have returned to outside society and remained crime free for a period of time. I urge you to support this legislation.